

TOWN OF AMHERST
TOWN/COMMERCIAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING, MAY 17, 2007

Present at meeting: Ira Bryck, Jerry Jolly, Jonathan Tucker, Leslie Arriola, Barry Roberts, Jeffrey Blaustein and Gloria Chang-Wade.

The meeting started at 5:35 pm, with a presentation by Vince O'Connor, who is the Petitioner behind Article 33, Bylaw Amendment – Energy Conservation by Maintaining the Night Sky. The proposed article would ban business/commercial and municipal buildings from being lit late at night, other than for fully shielded lighting for security or nighttime use by employees. Town Meeting voted to defer action on this article until it had heard from TCRC on this issue.

Mr. O'Connor stated that his goal is to keep the night sky as dark as is reasonably possible in order to maximize astronomers' enjoyment of the night sky and to achieve energy conservation. He explained that he preferred to accomplish this with a general bylaw amendment rather than a zoning bylaw so that, if passed, the regulation would affect everyone equally. The changes, if approved by Town Meeting, would go through the Town Inspectors. There would be a cost to comply but energy conservation would be achieved making use of modern technology lighting and would offset the cost of implementation. The brightly lit poles at the local school were cited by the presenter as an example of lighting that could be improved.

Mr. O'Connor answered a few questions by TCRC members:

- 1) Had the Chief of Police Sherpa been consulted? The latter had not been consulted and had not offered any input concerning this article.
- 2) Who would interpret what constitutes "security lighting"? Town officials would realize that security lighting is an important issue for employers and Mr. O'Connor expects that the attitude of town officials would be one of cooperation rather than emphasizing imposing fines. There is already an educational aspect to this issue since shielded lighting is now a warrant article.

Jeffrey Blaustein moved, and seconded by Leslie Arriola, that The TCRC take the position that, although the members support maintaining the night sky and promoting energy conservation, they did not support Article 33 for the following reasons:

- 1) the proposed shielded lighting is restrictive to business because it creates a financial hardship (business owners have on their own been in the practice of introducing energy conservation and would prefer the carrot rather than the stick approach)
- 2) what constitutes "security lighting" is open to interpretation
- 3) having some lights on and others off at night affects the nighttime atmosphere and creates a less vibrant nighttime scene downtown – keeping in mind that all efforts to promote downtown business at night are to be encouraged
- 4) there needs to be more specificity about enforcing the fines proposed

5) more education would achieve the same goals rather than proposing non-criminal fines which are not enforceable.

The motion passed unanimously. The Committee agreed that Mark Parent, or in his absence, Jeffrey Blaustein or Barry Roberts, would present formally the TCRC position before Town Meeting when Article 33 came up for consideration.

The TCRC agenda then reverted to the normal process. The minutes of the previous meeting was accepted without objection.

OLD BUSINESS

TCRC had supported the Town Manager's proposal to hire an economic development coordinator, but because of the dire budget conditions due to the failure of the tax override, the position was eliminated. Jonathan Tucker commented that some of the proposed duties of the economic development coordinator will be taken on by staff, and one could always hope that the position could be secured by a grant.

NEW BUSINESS

DOWNTOWN ACTION PLAN: All members would review the latest updates before the next committee meeting in June. Any comments or revisions should be directed to the Chair, Mark Parent, with a copy to Jonathan.

UPCOMING ITEMS:

Jeffrey Blaustein mentioned that upcoming Town Meeting warrants would include Buying Local and Fair Share issues. He suggested inviting Cinda Jones, the petitioner behind Buying Local to a future TCRC meeting.

Since Parking is still a matter of concern before the Committee, the members agreed to invite members of the Parking Task Force and other involved constituents to attend the next TCRC meeting in June.

Barry Roberts, a member of the Comprehensive Planning Economic Work Group, mentioned that that group would be inviting Jonathan Tucker and the TCRC to give format input to that committee.

Gloria Chang-Wade announced that she would be resigning from the TCRC Committee by June, coinciding with the expiration of her 3 year Town Meeting representative position. That would leave the committee with two positions to be filled, since Jane Ashby had resigned earlier from the Committee.

At the next meeting, June 21st, the issue of holding meetings in July and August would be discussed. The meeting was adjourned at 7 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Gloria Chang-Wade